



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Statement by Christopher Briggs, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands, in support of the International Day for Biological Diversity 2014

On this International Day for Biological Diversity we are delighted to join the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in celebrating the biodiversity of islands. Islands host a rich variety of animal and plant species, in complex and often unique ecosystems. Every one of their coastlines and all their surrounding shallow waters come under the responsibility of the Ramsar Convention therefore we share interest in and concerns for their status and continuing richness.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands promotes the sustainable use of wetlands and their resources. Wetlands are among the most biodiverse ecosystems on earth, and coastal wetlands that are typical of islands in the tropics, such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds, host some of the most biologically diverse and productive communities in the world.

Coral reefs, for example, cover only 0.2% of the world's oceans but contain about 25% of marine species. Coral reefs do more than support species – they also support people. It is estimated that around 500 million people have some level of dependence upon coral reefs, for example using them for food, income from fishing or coastal protection. About 30 million people are totally dependent on coral reefs.

Thanks to their beauty and rich wildlife coral reefs are also major attractions for tourists. Ramsar's recent report *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for water and wetlands* estimated the monetary value of recreation and tourism services provided by coral reefs at up to US\$1 million per hectare per year.

Coral reefs, mangroves and other coastal wetlands also protect island shorelines from storms and help offset carbon emissions.

Despite the benefits and services they provide, coastal wetlands are being lost and damaged at an alarming pace. As many as 27% of monitored reefs have been lost and up to 32% of the rest are at risk.

Ramsar help protect these areas and maintain their biodiversity. In Fiji, for example, the government is working with the local community and WWF to designate Cakaulevu Reef as a "Wetland of International Importance" under the Convention.

Cakaulevu, the third longest continuous barrier reef in the world, supports the livelihood of 70,000 people. The reef is already protected under traditional customary law, but international recognition will further protect the site against threats such as illegal fishing.

The Convention is also supporting the Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in the Caribbean. Through this initiative, 11 island nations are building capacity for the implementation of the Convention in the Caribbean.

We join the Convention on Biological Diversity and its partners in raising awareness about the great variety of animal and plants species living in and around islands and the important role they play for people and nature.